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Food & Nutrition

October 1979 Volume 9 Number 5

Handicapped Children Learn About Food

Three articles tell how people are tailoring nutrition education to the special needs of children who are mentally retarded or physically handicapped. **Page 2**

Nutriduck Is My Name...

A nutritionist with the Memphis City School System has found a delightful way to "get the nutrition message" across to young children. **Page 7**

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PTA Members Plan Projects In 20 States

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How the District Issues Food Stamps

The District of Columbia has made some changes in the way it issues food stamps. Changes include special steps to help the elderly and handicapped. **Page 14**



We'd like to hear from you. . . .

If your job is getting food help to families, or nutritious meals to kids, you've got a lot in common with the other readers of FOOD AND NUTRITION.

Do you have any ideas you'd like to share? Comments on our articles, or suggestions? Maybe you've found answers to problems other people are working on.

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Office of Legislative Affairs
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Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250



Handicapped Children Learn About Food

A Memphis project tests approaches and materials

"The foods we want to discuss today are breads and cereals. Breads and cereals are important because they give us energy. All of us need energy to work and play. How many of you had toast for breakfast?"

At first glance, it's just another class on nutrition—the teacher showing slides and talking about food, the children baking bran muffins and tasting grain products.

But, this class is special, because the children are. Their I.Q.'s are far below average. And because of this, they're the focus of a project, funded by the Food and Nutrition Service, to develop nutrition education for mentally retarded youngsters.

At a center in Memphis

This project is taking place at the University of Tennessee's Child Development Center in Memphis. The center—a government-funded and university-affiliated institution—trains professionals from a variety of fields to work in an interdisciplinary way with developmentally handicapped children. These are children who are physically handicapped, mentally retarded, or both.

Part of this training takes place in a demonstration school which is housed in the center. And this school is the setting for the project.

Three classes are involved in the study. One class has mildly retarded children, with I.Q.'s ranging from 50 to 70, while another has moderately retarded children, with I.Q.'s of 30 to 50. A larger class of kindergarten children of average intelligence serves as the control group. Although the children in the first two classes are older than the children in the control group, all three classes are at about the same level of mental development.

The youngsters are being taught four nutrition units on meats, breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, and milk products. The objectives are to teach recognition of the foods, their origin and nutritional contribution to the diet, and the number of servings that should be eaten daily.

Virginia Johnson, a graduate student who's employed as project coordinator, plans and teaches one les-

son on each of the four subjects. In addition, she provides the regular classroom teachers with material for supplemental lessons on the same topics, and sends letters to parents suggesting activities to do at home.

Lessons are tested

The effectiveness of the lessons is being measured through verbal tests



“Nutrition education for the mentally retarded is very possible. You might have to work a little harder to teach them, but you know you’re teaching them something they really need to learn.”

and a plate-waste study.

A series of pre- and post-tests are used to determine the children's previous knowledge, as well as their comprehension and retention of lesson material. Johnson tests the children individually, using food models and pictures.

"Some of the children cannot communicate very well verbally, so I have to ask them to point to answers rather than say them," she explained.

The plate waste study is designed to measure the actual impact of the lessons on the children's eating habits. On days designated for testing, trays and milk cartons are labeled with the children's names and weighed both before and after lunch.

The food service staff helped work out the details of the plate waste study, and conducted a number of trial runs before the project began. And, since the Child Development Center is interdisciplinary, the nutrition staff got help from the psychology and special education departments in designing the lessons and tests.

Dr. Mary Ann Smith, project director and chief of nutrition at the center, explained the philosophy behind the project. "Although much attention is now focused on nutrition education for the normal child," she said, "little or no attention is being given to the handicapped.

"Developmentally disabled children have the same nutritional needs as normal children, as well as additional needs. For example, the incidence of underweight in these children is three times as high as in normal children. Therefore, we have to pay more attention to their intake of calories, as well as other nutrients."

As these children are "mainstreamed" into regular classrooms, Dr. Smith noted, the need becomes even greater for nutrition education materials that can be used by regular



classroom teachers when working with the handicapped.

Staff offers suggestions

The results of this study will be published when the project is completed, and made available to the public. In the meantime, the center's staff offered some suggestions for those teaching nutrition to retarded youngsters:

- Let the children experience things for themselves as much as possible. Plan activities that allow them to use all their senses.
- Limit the amount of lecturing you do, and present material in as entertaining a manner as possible.
- Try to teach all material on the level of the learner.

- Overplan activities, and then be flexible.

- Use repetition as a teaching tool.

As Virginia Johnson said, "Nutrition education for the mentally retarded is very possible. You might have to work a little harder to teach them, but you know you're teaching them something they really need to learn."

by Linda Klein

“We chose foods that are good for you. The children learned that a snack doesn't need to be sweet to be good. It worked best to make things that could be completed in our classroom so we made nobake cookies, celery stuffed with peanut butter, and popcorn served with orange juice.”

A Washington teacher uses USDA foods as teaching tool

Many teachers and nutritionists are independently exploring ways to teach handicapped children about food and its importance to health.

Gale Forrest is one of those teachers. A special education teacher in Marysville, Washington, Forrest last year developed a series of lessons on food and nutrition for students with learning disabilities or behavior problems.

Using USDA-donated foods as teaching tools, she helped her students link sounds and sights with concepts, and careful work with good—and tasty—results. Students helped choose recipes, mix foods, and prepare their own afternoon snacks.

Forrest worked with two groups of about a dozen students each in grades 1 through 5. She met with her classes for 3 hours each day, and they cooked once a week during the last hour on Friday. She said the children were excited about the activity and looked forward to it. Many of them had not been motivated by regular classroom activities.

Satisfying in many ways

During the week, students chose a recipe. If there were ingredients needed in addition to the USDA-donated foods, children would volunteer to bring them from home.

On the day they actually cooked, students began by copying the recipe from the blackboard. This gave them a chance to practice their writing skills and to make something to take to their parents—along with a sample of the finished product.

“One to eat and one to take home became a general rule,” Forrest said. “Somehow it was more fun than showing paperwork to mom.

“Children want to take something

home from school that will be admired and approved of,” she continued. “For some of these children, that satisfaction is just too rare.”

Forrest used food preparation to reinforce arithmetic and reading as well as writing skills. “Each child got a chance to measure, mix, and spoon out,” she explained.

The children were learning social skills, too. “Five children worked with me, and five with an aide,” Forrest said. “They each had their tasks, and they saw that everybody working together made something nice happen for the group.

“Some of our children had been too disruptive for a regular classroom. But even when gooey batter seemed to invite disaster, they all followed directions,” she added.

Learned about food

Forrest said the practical experience of planning and food preparation taught the children a lot and corrected a number of misconceptions they had.

“Some of the children had thought cookies only come off a store shelf,” she said, citing one example. “It was good for them to start with basic ingredients and end up with a home-made product.

“We chose foods that are good for you. The children learned that a snack doesn't need to be sweet to be good. It worked best to make things that could be completed in our classroom so we made no-bake cookies, celery stuffed with peanut butter, and popcorn served with orange juice.”

This year, Forrest's schedule does not lend itself to classroom cooking, but she plans to renew the project when there is an opportunity.

“A friend of mine who teaches kindergarten used the same idea with her class,” Forrest said. “But she added an extra touch that I like. She had the children put together a cook-

book from the recipes they tested.”

Asked about the benefits to students, Forrest said: “The rewards were immediate. That means a lot to children who have been discouraged about learning.

“I can't say any child became a better reader as a direct result. But the project made my students happier, more motivated and more self-confident and those are usually steps toward better grades.

“The food was good. The experience was good. And we all had a good time.”

by Wini Scheffler

Children at a residential center learn some new skills

Four children are gathered around a table. Two are in wheelchairs, and one is propped up in a small bed. Only one is seated in a regular chair. They listen attentively as their teacher explains a picture recipe for peanut butter-raisin toast.

These children, who are both physically handicapped and moderately to severely mentally retarded



are students at the Georgia Retardation Center. The center is a residential facility for the mentally retarded, serving primarily children and teenagers. Located on the outskirts of Atlanta, the center provides treatment for youngsters from 47 counties in the northern portion of the State.

Peggy Frazier, a registered dietitian, works part-time at the center,

teaching two food classes a week. Each class is made up of four students, whose chronological ages range from 8 to 13.

Identification is the focus

"Originally I was going to teach 'nutrition,' but I found that it was impossible to teach, say, the vitamin C

content of an orange when the children could not even identify an orange," she explained.

"So food identification is the big thing that I teach now—mainly because most of these students have been institutionalized all of their lives. All they know is that food is served on a tray, from a food cart, and prepared in the institution's kitchen.

She also teaches them certain basic skills, such as spreading, cutting, mixing, and pouring. And she emphasizes safety in the kitchen.

Because of their multiple handicaps, Frazier explained, these children will probably never be able to live on their own. But, she added, she would like them to be able to return to their families knowing how to do some simple things for themselves—preparing cheese toast and other snacks, for example.

Introduces new foods

Frazier teaches her classes in a room that used to be part of an apartment for houseparents. She has a refrigerator and sink, but since the stove isn't connected, she cooks with a toaster, a toaster oven, or a hot plate. Each month she spends about \$12 on supplies.

Most of her classes involve either cooking or watching a movie. When the class cooks, she tries to let the children taste the raw foods, as well as the finished product. And she tries to introduce a new food at least every other week. "If I feel it's a worthwhile experience, I will repeat the class about every 3 months," she noted.

When working with mentally retarded youngsters, Frazier said, it's important to gauge your expectations to the level of the children's development. "You have to repeat things. And you have to learn to measure success in inches rather than miles."

"But I find teaching these children very satisfying. They're cooperative, and they seem to enjoy almost everything you plan."

by Linda Klein



“... Most of these children have been institutionalized all of their lives. All they know is that food is served on a tray, from a food cart, and prepared in the institution's kitchen.”

Nutriduck Is My Name...

Who has orange panty hose, yellow wings, tail feathers, felt-covered flippers, a papier-mache head and is an expert in nutrition? The answer is "Nutriduck!"

You may not know Nutriduck, but Memphis elementary schoolchildren do. He visits their schools to teach them about nutrition and food.

This knowledgeable bird is part of the Memphis City School System's nutrition information program. Underneath the costume is Helen Burke, a nutritionist with the school system and coordinator of its nutrition program.

Burke visits schools carrying a case full of charts, films and other information tools. When she meets with high school students, she leaves her costume behind. But with elementary school students, she always poses as Nutriduck.

Gets children interested

Burke created Nutriduck last October, she said, when she needed something to help get the nutrition message across. "Since children pay more attention to characters, we tried to think of one they could identify with. We came up with Nutriduck. The children's response has been really fantastic.

"Some third and fourth grade classes actually helped me make Nutriduck's papier-mache head. I made the rest of the costume myself.

"The students are eager to learn about food so they can evaluate their own diets to see what they may be lacking."

"Hands on" experience

Students get "hands on" experience through the nutrition course. Food service employees at the schools show students how to prepare food and plan nutritional meals, and they explain the importance of



sanitation in cooking areas.

The food service people use the National School Lunch Program meal patterns as examples of nutritionally balanced meals. They hold tasting parties, also, to introduce students to new foods.

In addition to developing the nutrition course, Burke also coordinates nutrition workshops for teachers and school food service people. Schools from neighboring counties and private schools have asked Burke to help coordinate their nutrition programs.

For more information, contact:
Helen Burke
Nutrition Resource Specialist
Memphis City Schools
2597 Avery Street, Room 120
Memphis, Tennessee 38112
by Marilyn Stackhouse

“On school visits, my lessons include consumer hints on food bargains, information on healthy diets, tips on reading food labels for nutrient content, and good eating habits. The lessons vary from school to school, according to age groups, and they reflect what parents, teachers, and school food service people determine as the nutritional needs of children in each particular school.”

Many Schools Can Get Extra Breakfast Aid

"If we can help one child learn, the breakfast program is worthwhile," says Enfield, Connecticut, school food service director Eleanor McDaniels.

If every one felt the way Eleanor McDaniels does, starting the day would be a lot easier—and a lot more productive—for millions of American schoolchildren.

It's hard to say exactly how many millions of children go to school without the benefit of a nourishing morning meal to give them the energy they need to learn effectively. According to recent USDA estimates, there are more than 13 million children who qualify for free or reduced price meals on the basis of family income. Because of their families' tight budgets, many of these children may be

coming to school without eating breakfast.

For millions of other children, money may not be a problem, but hectic early morning routines may be. Many students travel long distances to school and don't have time to eat or aren't hungry before they leave home. In families where both parents work, the demands of early-to-work schedules can make preparing breakfast difficult—or impossible. Some parents have to leave for work very early, and even though they may want to eat breakfast with their children, they can't.

Schools can serve breakfast

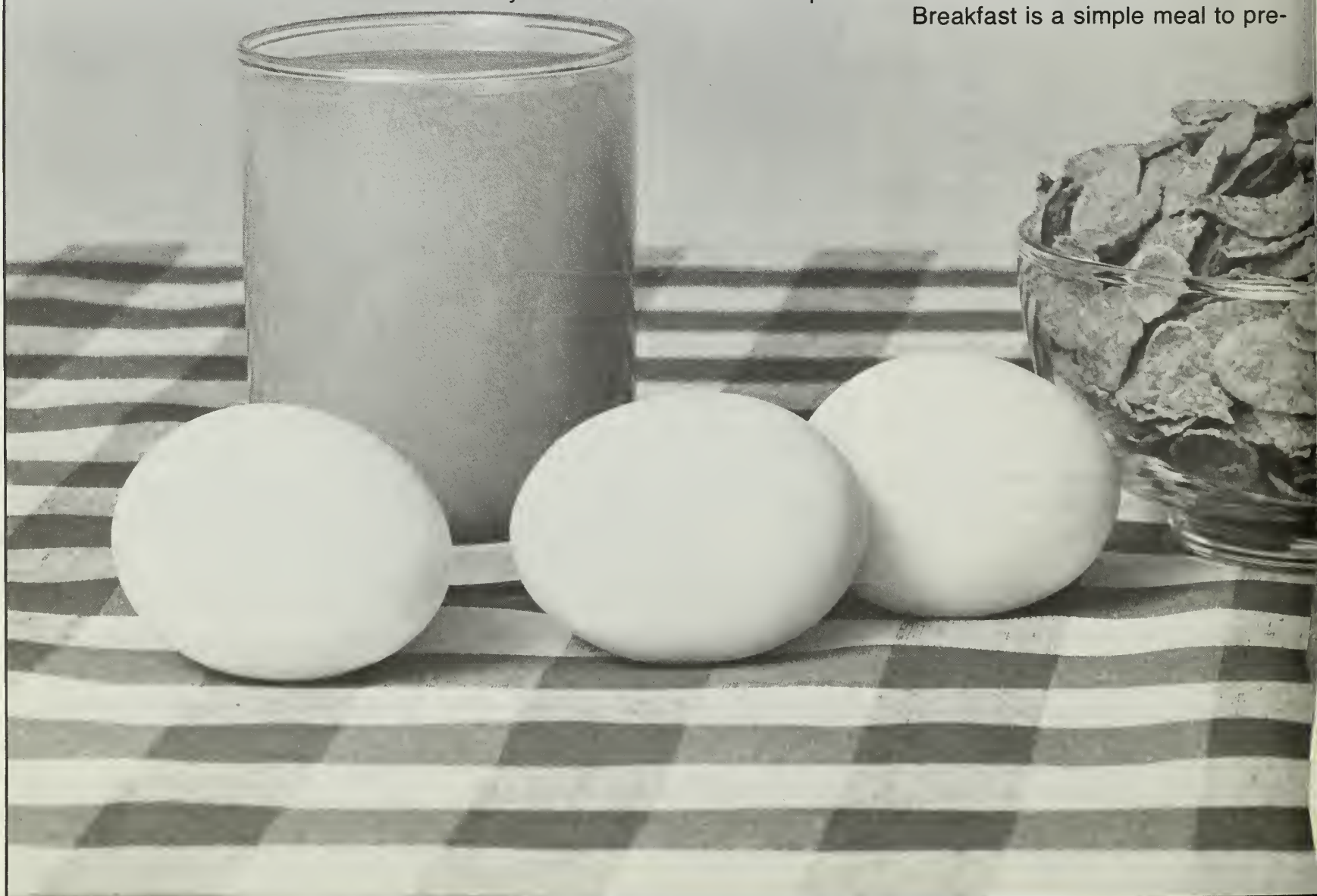
For the last 12 years, through the School Breakfast Program, Federal money has been available to help

schools serve breakfast to students who, for one reason or another, don't eat breakfast at home.

Thousands of schools are now getting this aid, which is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through State Departments of Education. But, despite the availability of the program to all schools and widespread need, the number of schools participating remains low.

In contrast to the approximately 94,500 schools taking part in the National School Lunch Program, only 30,500 schools take part in the School Breakfast Program. Whereas 44.5 million children have access to lunch at school, only 14 million have access to breakfast at school. And, while almost 25 million children participate in the lunch program, only 3 million eat breakfast at school.

Breakfast is a simple meal to pre-



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Breakfast is a simple meal to pre-

pare and serve—in fact, it's a whole lot easier than lunch. The breakfast program costs less to operate than the lunch program, and application procedures are the same.

While there are differences in the amounts of reimbursement, the underlying principle is the same: schools get reimbursed for every meal they serve, and the rates are higher for meals served free or at re-

duced price to qualifying children.

Moreover, because average reimbursement levels are adjusted twice a year to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index, schools can be assured that reimbursement rates will keep pace with any increases in the costs of preparing and serving food.

So, why don't more schools join?


Part of the answer is attitude, says Margaret Glavin, national director of the school breakfast program. Commitment to the breakfast program is a matter of philosophies. There's been a lot of resistance to the idea of schools serving breakfast.

When you add to this philosophical resistance, questions about staffing, budgeting, and scheduling, there can be powerful obstacles to overcome in starting a breakfast program.

The obstacles are by no means insurmountable—ask any parent or school administrator who's successfully worked to get breakfast started in a local school. But overcoming them does require careful planning. Documenting need, anticipating

A basic school breakfast includes at least: a serving of fruit, vegetable or juice; milk; and bread or cereal. Many schools also include a serving of meat or meat alternate, such as cheese, eggs, or peanut butter.





problems and solutions, and re-searching available resources are important steps.

Recent changes should help

This year the Food and Nutrition Service has been working on regulatory changes which should help expand and improve the breakfast program. The new regulations extend eligibility for extra Federal funds to many schools with severe need for breakfast programs.

Although the term "severe need" is new to breakfast program regulations, the practice of offering extra funds to schools as an incentive to join the program is not new. Since its inception, the school breakfast program has included various financial incentives to encourage schools to participate. "Especially needy" schools, as they were previously known, have always been entitled to extra Federal funds to offset the cost of preparing and serving breakfast.

Despite this fact, these funds have not been widely used. During the 1978-79 school year for example, only 28 States actually paid the additional "especially needy" funds to some of their breakfast schools. In several of these States, only a handful of schools received the funds.

Why use has been limited

There are several reasons why the use of these funds has been limited. And it is these reasons the "severe need" regulations address.

First, before the 1979-80 school year, States set their own eligibility standards for "especially needy" schools within broad FNS guidelines.

Some States established restrictive standards that only a small number of schools could meet.

The "severe need" regulations set new minimum national eligibility standards for the extra funds. States may establish more flexible or lenient standards, but not more stringent standards.

Second, in the past, there has been some confusion about the entitlement nature of these extra funds, particularly on the part of State and local administrators. In the National School Lunch Program, States are paid a set rate, or "national average payment," for each free, reduced-price, or full-price lunch served in their State. In order to pay one or more school districts an above-average rate, State's must pay other school districts a below-average rate.

Apparently, administrators have assumed that the same system works in the breakfast program. It doesn't though. States receive two separate payments in the breakfast program. They get a set rate, or "national average payment," for each free, reduced-price, and full-price breakfast served in regular schools. In addition, they get a second, higher set rate for all "severe need" schools. This means they can pay severe need rates to one school district without having to pay less to another school district.

Confusion compounded

The confusion has been compounded by the use of the term "especially needy" in both the breakfast program and the food service equipment assistance program. The equipment assistance program provides funds to local school districts to offset the cost of items—such as ranges, refrigerators, milk coolers, and toasters—used in the lunch or breakfast program.

Within broad USDA guidelines, each State sets standards specifying which schools are eligible for "especially needy" equipment funding. This designation entitles a school to up to 100-percent funding of its equipment costs, rather than the up to 75 percent schools usually receive. However, since States' equipment monies are limited, paying one school 100 percent of its costs reduces the money available for other schools.

Again, the payment of "severe need" funds in the breakfast program does not work this way. And one of the reasons for changing the term "especially needy" to "severe need" was to avoid confusion with the equipment program.

Determining "severe need"

The new regulations set minimum standards for determining which schools qualify for extra funding because of severe need. According to these national standards, schools are entitled to "severe need" funds if regular reimbursement is insufficient to cover their breakfast program costs *and if*:

- 1) They are required by State law to run a breakfast program, *or*
- 2) They serve 40 percent of more of their lunches free or at a reduced price. Schools without lunch programs may use breakfast participation figures to qualify for "severe need" funds. And schools without either breakfast or lunch programs may estimate their free and reduced-price participation rates.

States can alter the national standards so that additional schools become eligible for the extra funds, but they cannot deny these funds to *any* schools eligible under national standards. For example, a State could set a standard extending eligibility to schools serving 10 percent of their lunches free or at reduced price. It could not, on the other hand, set a standard requiring schools to be serving 50 percent of their lunches free or at reduced price.

Accounting is easier

In addition to making more schools eligible for "severe need" money, the new regulations also make it easier for school districts to get this money by eliminating some accounting procedures.

To get "severe need" money under the old system, districts had to document individual school costs and the percentages of children receiving free and reduced-price meals. Now, breakfast costs can be figured on a districtwide rather than a school-by-school basis, even though eligibility for the extra funds is still determined on a school-by-school basis.

This is expected to be especially helpful for school districts with centralized accounting systems, particularly those with a combination of se-

vere need and non-severe need schools. These districts will now be able to get "severe need" money without keeping separate cost records on their "severe need" schools.

Here's how the new system works. In figuring payments to a district, the State calculates both:

1. The district's costs of operating the breakfast program in *all* schools minus money collected from full- and reduced-price breakfasts.

2. The maximum reimbursement available to all schools in the district. This is figured by: multiplying the number of breakfasts served in "severe need" schools by the "severe need" reimbursement rates; multiplying the number of breakfasts served in other schools by the regular reimbursement rates; and then adding these two totals.

The State pays the district the lesser of these two amounts.

For more information

For more information on the national "severe need" standards, contact the School Programs Division, Food and Nutrition Service, Washington, DC. 20250. For more information on eligibility in a particular State, contact the State Department of Education.

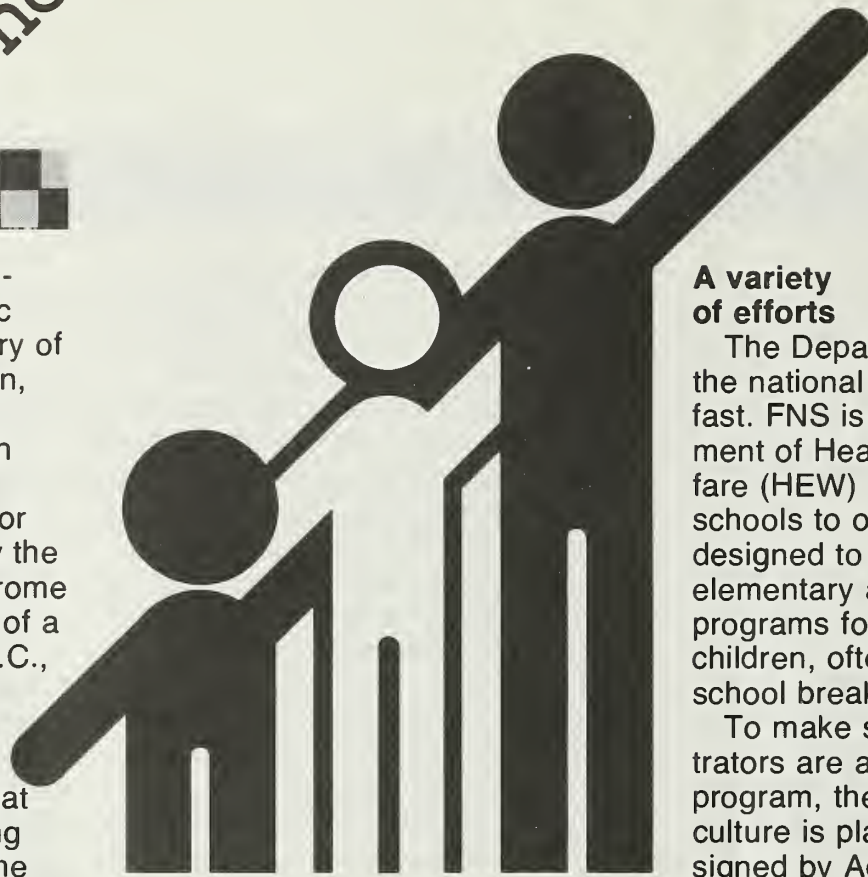
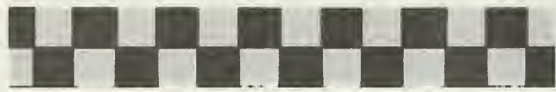
Remember, State Departments of Education may set standards which are more flexible than the national standards. So schools which do not qualify under the national standards may still qualify under their State's standards.

Also, some schools may now be serving basic breakfasts—like cereal, juice, and milk—and operating their breakfast programs within the regular reimbursement. If these schools meet their State's requirement for free and reduced-price meal participation, or are required to offer breakfast under State law, they may be able to get "severe need" money to improve their programs—by adding protein-rich foods and occasional hot breakfasts, for example.

The new breakfast regulations were published in the Federal Register August 17. Copies are available from the School Programs Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC. 20250. □



School Breakfast: Reaching More Schools



Expansion of the breakfast program "is not the result of a magic process," said Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman, speaking at the National School Breakfast Coalition Conference in March.

"I know of no 'open sesame' or magic wands that will brush away the 'breakfast is a family affair' syndrome or dispel the lingering nightmare of a national nanny in Washington, D.C., dictating today what Johnny and Mary will eat tomorrow in Iowa City.

"You and I know all too well that there is no magic—that expanding the breakfast program will take the combined efforts of all of us at Federal, State and local levels.

Let's combine our efforts

Federal-State-local cooperation is the nucleus around which USDA's breakfast outreach efforts revolve this year. Nineteen States have agreed to work with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service as well as community groups on a variety of efforts to expand breakfast participation. FNS regional staffs are involved in a number of projects—from conducting detailed feasibility studies on breakfast, to workshops for State personnel, to public information campaigns planned in conjunction with the States. For example:

In New England. FNS staff members are providing information and assistance to prospective school breakfast support groups—including State associations of elementary and secondary school principals, school board members, school administrators and the Catholic Education Association. They have also developed a breakfast video-tape, "A Break for Learning," and worked with the New Hampshire Bread and Law Task Force on a school breakfast slide show.

In the Mid-Atlantic States. FNS is working with the Pennsylvania De-

partment of Education and the Pittsburgh school district on a feasibility study of ways to start breakfast programs in Pittsburgh. The staff is also distributing posters and other materials.

In the Mountain Plains States. The FNS staff is working with the State education commissioners and school officials in Nebraska and Utah to publicize and expand breakfast programs.

In the Western States. The FNS staff has developed extensive breakfast outreach plans with Oregon and Washington. In Oregon, FNS assisted in developing a statewide steering committee that will advise the State on breakfast outreach. The committee includes health professionals, community activists, and school administrators as well as FNS representatives.

In addition to targeting States for special outreach efforts, the Department of Agriculture has awarded \$230,000 in grants for the development of outreach projects which can be used as models for future efforts at Federal, State, and local levels.

A variety of efforts

The Department is also moving on the national level to promote breakfast. FNS is working with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) to encourage Title I schools to offer breakfast. Title I is designed to expand and improve elementary and secondary school programs for educationally deprived children, often those in need of school breakfast programs.

To make sure school administrators are aware of the breakfast program, the Department of Agriculture is planning to send a letter, signed by Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland and H.E.W. Secretary Patricia Harris, explaining how schools can take part.

At the same time, the Agriculture Department is contacting national organizations—such as the American Dental Association, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the National Association of Pupil Personnel Administrators—and enlisting their support.

The Department is also spreading the word on breakfast through a variety of media including magazines, newspapers and radio. Radio spots offer breakfast endorsements from such nationally known celebrities as: actress Rita Moreno, comedian Rodney Dangerfield, television star Gabriel Kaplan, basketball star Julius "Dr. J" Erving of the Philadelphia 76'ers, and singer-dancer-actress Leslie Uggams, who won acclaim recently for her role in the television production of "Roots."

Catalogue of materials

Since many States and community groups have produced a wealth of materials on school breakfast, the Department is producing a catalogue of these materials. The catalogue will be available this year. □

by Dianne D. Jenkins

PTA Members Plan Projects In 20 States

This is the month when thousands of parents traditionally join their children for lunch at school. Each fall, schools across the country invite parents, teachers, and community leaders to come and help celebrate National School Lunch Week.

But this year's celebration will take on added meaning for parents and teachers in 20 States, for by October they will already have become particularly involved in school food service. Under a cooperative agreement between the National PTA and the Food and Nutrition Service, they are looking closely into what children eat at school and how they learn about food.

The agreement's eventual aim is to show PTA members proven paths to better nutrition programs through student, parent, and community involvement. It was born out of a series of brainstorming meetings which began when the PTA, anxious to help improve school meal programs, came to the Food and Nutrition Service for suggestions. Together, the PTA and FNS created a joint task force, which, in turn came up with a proposal for a joint campaign.

Campaign has three parts

Three major stages of work, two of which are already completed, are provided for. The first was to notify all PTA chapters of the effort. Chapters could apply to take part by proposing ways in which they could improve meal quality and expand lunch and breakfast programs.

The second was to choose 20 States for model projects, on the basis of past success or innovative

proposals. The States selected are: New Mexico, Oklahoma, Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Michigan, and Ohio.

The third stage, pending completion of the projects, will be to disseminate the results to the Association's entire membership of 6.5 million people.

"We are providing the funds and technical advice and the PTA is providing the volunteers to do the work," Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman explained.

"The PTA model projects will be invaluable," she said, speaking before the National PTA convention in Milwaukee, "in improving meal quality, enhancing the lunch environment, reducing plate waste, and increasing student participation."

Parent-school cooperation

In addition to inviting States to propose projects for funding under the agreement, the task force asked States to describe notable actual instances of parent-school cooperation. Positive responses ranged from a school which rejoined the lunch program after a joint analysis by the faculty and the student body showed it was needed and could be well run, to several schools which curtailed sales of minimally nutritious foods.

Some schools increased food choices, decreased the use of sugar, and sought student advice on menus, food preparation, and cleanup. Others established breakfast programs and onsite meal preparation.

"The Federal Government," Foreman said in her address, "can and does provide cash and food assistance . . . But only you, and people like you . . . know, or can learn, how food is prepared and served; whether the children have enough time to eat; and whether the lunchroom is condu-

cive to eating . . . The PTA is solidly rooted at the local level, and is respected at every level. That is why I am so very pleased that you will be working with us and speaking with a louder voice on child nutrition."

PTA leaders enthusiastic

The agreement was signed in May by then National PTA President Grace Baisinger. Her successor, Virginia Sparling, recently elected to that office, reaffirmed the organization's keen interest: "In view of the National PTA's historical concern with proper nutrition for children, we believe we have made a significant move in joining forces with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a major campaign to improve and expand child nutrition programs in the public schools.

"We are particularly enthusiastic about participating in this project because of the direct benefits that will accrue to children throughout the country in terms of better quality breakfast and lunch programs, and improved nutrition. This project also offers a rare opportunity to adults, students, and the PTA to have a direct impact on such an important and pervasive program."

Will publish a brochure

Agriculture Department funding for the State projects will continue until April 1980, when analysis of the results will commence. The conclusions, to be sent to all PTA members in the form of a brochure, are expected next summer.

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by Chris Kocsis

How the District Issues Food Stamps

"I think it's very, very nice," said an elderly food stamp participant, talking about the new way she gets her food stamps. "You don't have to go out, and it's so hard for me to get places, you know."

"Before, it would take right much time, the way I have to get around. There were a couple of times I had to pay somebody—I paid the man \$3 to take me to get my food stamps."

This past April, the District of Columbia took some steps to make it easier for food stamp clients to get their stamps and to encourage banks and other institutions to join the program as issuance agents.

As a result of a special project, over 1,000 elderly and handicapped people can now pick up their food stamps in the public housing complexes where they live. Before, in

spite of the special difficulties they have getting around, they had to make their way to issuance centers located in various parts of the city.

According to District officials, the pilot project is expected to be expanded to all city housing projects for elderly and handicapped people by the end of the year.

In addition to the pilot project, the District is staggering issuance of food stamps to all other clients to cut down on waiting time and reduce lines in banks and other issuance centers.

"We're making these changes," says Albert Russo, director of the District's Department of Human Resources, "because we want to make it possible for all eligible people to obtain their food stamps as conveniently as possible."

Clients had long waits

"We were concerned because clients have had to stand in long waiting lines in all kinds of weather," says Grady Williams, bureau chief of payments and collections. "This placed severe hardships on the elderly, of course. In addition to having to travel long distances from their homes, they had to stand in the rain and cold," he says. To some extent, Williams feels, this discouraged people from participating.

"It's still a bit early to tell what kind of increase there will be in participation, but it seems safe to say there will be an increase," says Williams. While participation in the District is already high—an estimated 85 percent of all eligible people—Williams hopes that with the elimination of the pur-



These District residents are among the many elderly people who get their food stamps in the housing complexes where they live.



chase requirement and easier access to food stamp issuance sites, participation will come close to 100 percent of those eligible.

Part of the District's effort to improve service involves staggering the issuance of food stamps over the first 5 working days of every month. Previously, everyone went to get their stamps on the same day.

"You could walk by the food stamp distribution centers and see long lines of people—extending for blocks sometimes," says Williams.

New system should help

Long lines at the first of the month were not only a hardship for clients, but posed a real problem for banks and institutions issuing stamps. Before staggered issuance, one bank

had pulled out of the program, others were threatening to do the same, and savings and loans institutions were reluctant to join.

"Banks and issuance offices are taking another look at the system now," says Muriel Yaeger, director of outreach in the District. "The one bank that had withdrawn from the system will be coming back into the program because of staggered issuance, and many savings and loans institutions are now expressing interest in joining."

Williams says the 1977 food stamp law has made it easier for institutions to issue food stamps. Because the law eliminated the requirement that participants purchase part of their food stamp allotments, issuance agents now handle fewer food stamp coupons and no cash at all.

"It certainly makes it easier from the standpoint of security," says Williams, explaining that the elimination of the purchase requirement has also helped the District arrange for food stamp issuance in housing projects.

"The reluctance that some vendors had is no longer there because they are no longer handling cash and aren't readily exposed to the threat of robbery."

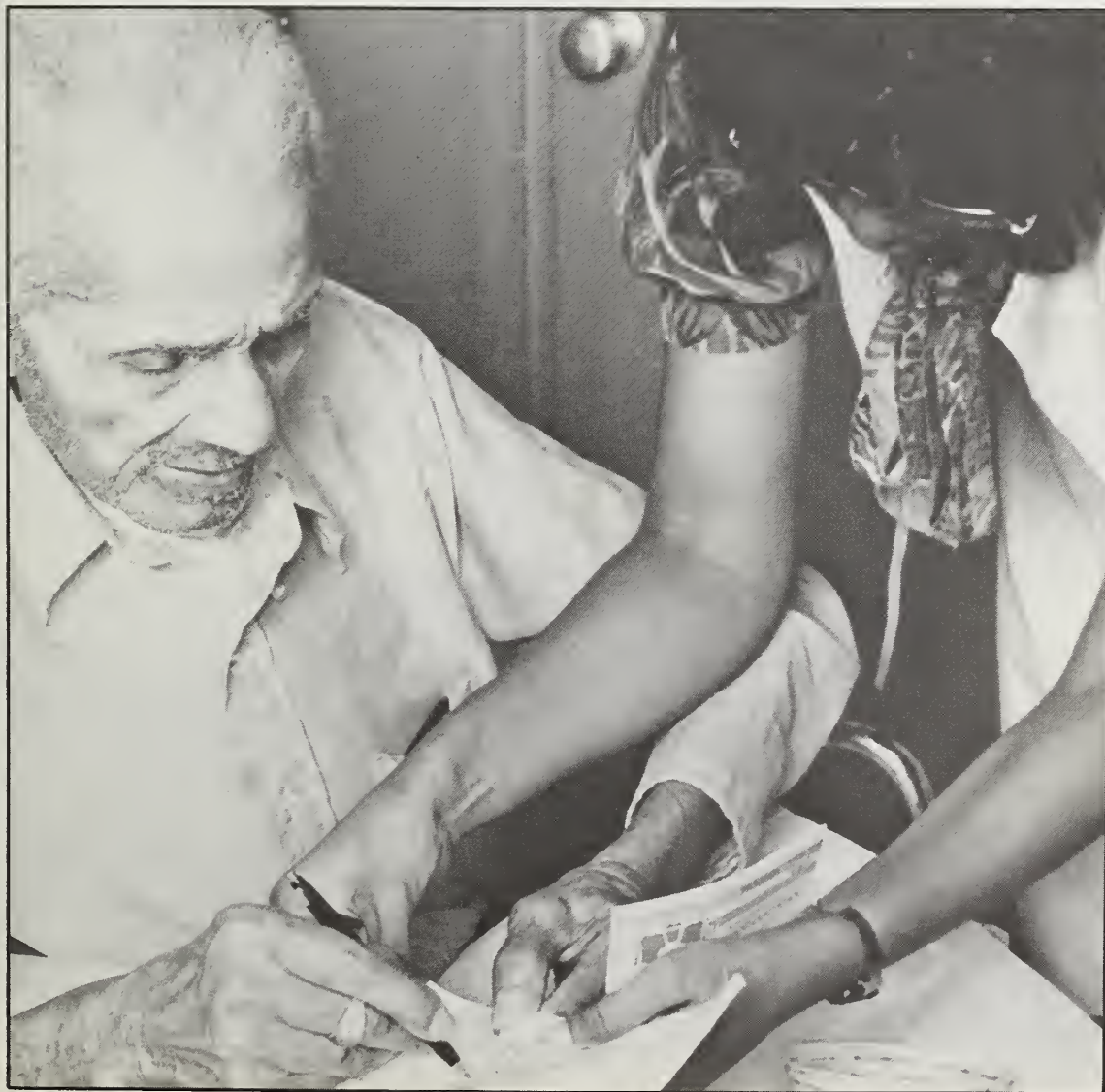
Security is not a problem

Security at the housing projects hasn't been a problem, according to Williams. The building manager distributes the stamps from specially constructed "cages" as a security guard looks on. Each manager receives 5 hours training on issuing stamps and security precautions.

Norman Bush, director of issuance for the District, visited several housing projects when the pilot project went into operation. "The clients were happy," he says, "everyone seems to be happy." The new system "works beautifully." □

by Dianne D. Jenkins

“ We were concerned because clients have had to stand in long waiting lines in all kinds of weather. This placed severe hardships on the elderly, of course. In addition to having to travel long distances from their homes, they had to stand in the rain and cold. ”



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